

HERACLITUS

Some Prolegomena...

Who was he?

- » From Ephesus (25 miles up the coast from Miletus)
- » Unpleasant, upper-class, arrogant, contemptuous

The nature of the textual evidence...

- » Aphoristic (pithy), often obscure style of writing... known as 'the Dark One', 'the Obscure', 'the Riddler'

A few controversial interpretive issues...

- » Are Heraclitus' views incoherent since what he says appears to be inconsistent and self-contradictory?
- » Is Heraclitus a proponent of the "radical flux" doctrine? Does everything 'flow' like a river?
- » Does Heraclitus try to solve the problem of *the one* and *the many* by positing 'fire' as the *archē* of reality?



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An Interpretation...

The *archē* of reality – *LOGOS*

- » The *one* fundamental, unifying, underlying, enduring, law-like (divine), governing principle of reality
- » The *LOGOS* “holds”, can be “heard” and “understood” by men, is “common”, yet elusive and “so deep” that its limits can never be discovered. All things “come-to-be in accordance with it”, and it is “wise to listen to it”

The principle/process of change – *Conflict and Tension*

- » Despite the appearance of stability and permanence, *the many* things are—most fundamentally—in a constant state of ‘change’ or ‘flux’, ‘strife’, ‘war’, ‘tension’ with one another.

The *true* nature of reality – “*Unity in Opposition*”

- » Unity is found in diversity... Stability and permanence depend on (and are ultimately underwritten by) change...



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The *archē* of reality – LOGOS

“Wisdom is one thing, to be skilled in true judgment, how all things are steered through all things...”

“Right thinking is the greatest excellence, and wisdom is to speak the truth and act in accordance with nature, while paying attention to it...”

“For this reason it is necessary to follow what is common. But although the LOGOS is common, most people live as if they had their own private understanding....”

“This LOGOS holds always but humans always prove unable to understand it... For though all things come to be in accordance with this LOGOS, humans are like the inexperienced when they experience such words and deeds as I set out, distinguishing each in accordance with its nature and saying how it is. But other people fail to notice what they do when awake, just as they forget what they do while asleep...”



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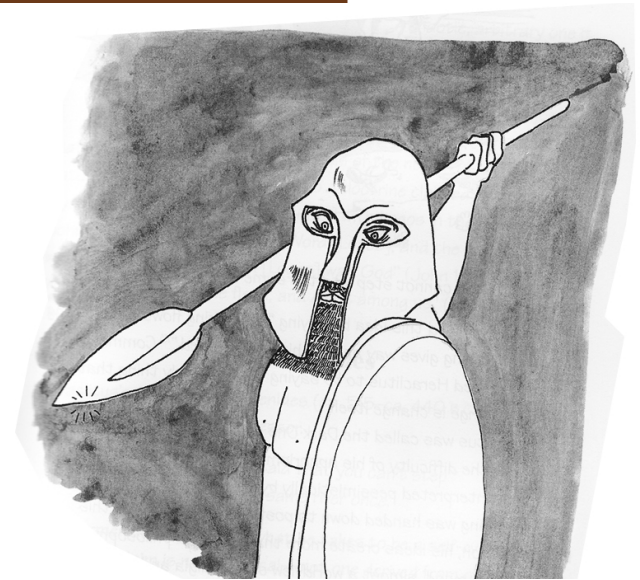
Change – Conflict and Tension

“It is necessary to know that war is common and justice is strife and that all things happen in accordance with strife and necessity...”

“War is the father of all and king of all, and some he shows as gods, others as humans; some he makes slaves, others free...”

“Heraclitus rebukes the author of the line ‘Would that strife might be destroyed from among gods and men’... for there would be no musical scale unless high and low existed, nor living creatures without female and male, which are opposite...”

“The cosmos, the same for all, none of the gods nor of humans has made, but it was always and is and shall be: an ever-lasting fire being kindled in measures and being extinguished in measures...”



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True Reality – “Unity in Opposition”

“Listening not to me but to the Logos it is wise to agree that all things are one...”

“Things taken together are whole and not whole, [something which is] being brought together and brought apart, in tune and out of tune; out of all things there comes a unity; and out of a unity all things...”

“Nature loves to hide...”

“An unapparent connection is stronger than an apparent one...”

“Changing it rests...”

“They do not understand how, though at variance with itself, it agrees with itself. It is a backwards-turning attunement like that of the bow and lyre...”

“Even the posset separates if it is not stirred...”

